



Description:

From the advent of “landlord tech” that tracks and scores tenants to Ring-enabled policing, from city government’s use of algorithms to tackle urban problems to the exploitation of gig workers by corporate platforms, the relationship between digital platforms and cities is impossible to ignore. These landscapes of “platform urbanism” are supported by a rural landscape of digital infrastructure including Amazon data centers, rare earth mining, and industrialized “smart” farms equipped with cutting edge artificial intelligence that feed a growing urban population. This course delves into the history, political economy, and power relations of digital platforms to explore how platforms and digital technologies more broadly are reshaping urban and rural geographies. We spend the first third of the course on theories and concepts, building a foundation of understanding of how to think about city and country; digital platforms; and the relationship between the digital, society, and space. We spend the rest of the course on case studies of platform geographies, including rural data centers and cryptocurrency mining, carcerality and border surveillance, precision agricultural technologies, and landlord technologies. We conclude by considering glitches as a way of building relationships to platforms that refuse domination, extraction, and predatory inclusion.

WEEK 1

Monday, August 29: INTRODUCTIONS

In our first class, we will introduce ourselves with a digital artifact, review the course together, and briefly discuss the idea of the algorithmic ecology.

Before you come to the first class, please complete the following:

1. Read/listen: Stop LAPD Spying Coalition and Free Radicals (2021) “[The Algorithmic Ecology: An Abolitionist Tool for Organizing Against Algorithms](#)” or [Algorithmic Ecology and Abolition](#) (podcast): first 27:30 minutes (roughly).

2. Annotate the syllabus in our class Google Drive folder
3. Introduce yourself with a digital artifact via the pre-class survey

WEEK 2

Monday, September 5: NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)

While class does not meet this week, I encourage you to consider signing up for a [live virtual tour of an Amazon fulfillment center](#) and to watch this [interview with Chris Smalls, president and founder of the Amazon Labor Union on The Daily Show](#).

The following readings/media are relevant (and optional):

1. Yvette Cabrera (2021). Garden of Hope: In the shadow of Amazon, resistance takes root in San Bernardino. *Grist*. <https://grist.org/justice/in-the-shadow-of-amazon-resistance-takes-root-in-san-bernardino/>
2. Matthew Stewart (2018). Amazon Urbanism: Patents and the totalizing world of big tech futures. *Failed Architecture*. <https://failedarchitecture.com/amazon-urbanism-patents-and-the-totalizing-world-of-big-tech-futures/>
3. Hinterlands Urbanism and Landscape and MODUS Collective (2016). Logistical Ecologies of the North American Operational Landscape (short film). <https://vimeo.com/162024142>

WEEK 3

Monday, September 12: CITY AND COUNTRY, PART I

Over the next two weeks, we delve into different approaches to understanding rural and urban space, and the relationship between the two. Part I offers perspectives that complicate and contextualize notions of urban and rural.

To read before class:

1. Saidiya Hartman (2017). The Terrible Beauty of the Slum *Brick: A Literary Journal*, Brick 99
2. Katherine McKittrick (2011). [On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place](#). *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(8). 947-963.
3. Libby Porter & Oren Yiftachel (2019) [Urbanizing settler-colonial studies: introduction to the special issue](#), *Settler Colonial Studies*, 9(2), p. 177-181 only.
4. Raymond Williams (1973). [A Problem of Perspective](#) (p. 9-12) and [Golden Ages](#) (p. 35-45). In: *The Country and the City*. Hogarth Press.

WEEK 4

Monday, September 19: CITY AND COUNTRY, PART II

In part II, we focus on the urban-rural relationship through concepts of operational landscapes, extended urbanization, and recombinant urbanization.

To read before class:

1. Sai Balakrishnan (2019). [Recombinant Urbanization: Agrarian-Urban Landed Property and Uneven development in India](#). *International Journal of Urban and regional Research* 43(4), 617-632.
2. Neil Brenner and Nikos Kitsikis (2020). [Operational landscapes: Hinterlands of the Capitalocene](#). *Architectural Design*, 90(1), 22-31.
3. AbdouMaliq Simone (2019). [Maximum exposure: making sense in the background of extended urbanization](#). *Environment and Planning D; Society and Space*, 37(6), 990-1006.

WEEK 5

Monday, September 26: PLATFORMS

What forces gave rise to the proliferation of sprawling digital platforms? How should we think about platforms and their geographical implications? Why are the spatial manifestations of capitalism even more important in a digital world?

To read before class:

1. Sarah Barns (2019). [Negotiating the platform pivot: From participatory digital ecosystems to infrastructures of everyday life](#). *Geography Compass*.
2. Jathan Sadowski (2019). [When data is capital](#). *Big Data & Society*, 6(1), 1-12.
3. Nick Srnicek (2017). [The Long Downturn](#). In: *Platform Capitalism*. Polity Books.

WEEK 6

Monday, October 3: TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

What is the role of technology in creating and exacerbating social inequalities? What are the problems with seeing technology as a neutral tool? How do technological changes affect society?

To read before class:

1. Ruha Benjamin (2019). [Engineered inequity](#). In: *Race after technology: Abolitionist tools for the New Jim Code* (p. 49-76). Polity Press
2. Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein (2020). "[What Gets Counted Counts](#)". In: *Data Feminism*. MIT Press.
3. Jenna Burrell and Marion Fourcade (2021). *The Society of Algorithms*.

WEEK 7

Monday, October 10: DIGITAL GEOGRAPHIES

This week we'll consider a range of perspectives on digital geographies: is the internet as a frictionless utopia and digital frontier, where the physical does not matter? What about how the physical world has become intertwined with the digital through networks of cables, sensors and location enabled services. How is internet infrastructure also social infrastructure? Does the digital exceed the real? How do we think the digital and space together?

To read before class:

1. John Perry Barlow (1996). [A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace](#)
2. Ingrid Burrington (2016). [Introduction \(p. 5-13\)](#). *Networks of New York*. Melville House Publishing.
3. Tamara Shepard (2017). [Neocolonial Intimacies](#). *The Zuckerberg Review*.
4. Jessica McLean (2020). Introduction (p. 1-11). *Changing Digital Geographies*. Palgrave MacMillan.

WEEK 8

Monday, October 17: URBAN TECHNOLOGIES

This week we examine urban experiments with technology past and present. We consider the metaphors that often shape thinking about cities, how the spectacle and apparent objectivity of technology can depoliticize the violence it perpetuates, the relationship between urban planning and technology, and the urban politics of technology.

To read before class:

1. Shannon Mattern (2017). [A City is Not a Computer](#). Or substitute podcast interview (approx. 45 minutes) "[How Smart is the Smart City?](#)" (w/ Paris Marx)
2. Jennifer Light (2003). [The City as a Communication System](#), (selected pages 35-51). In: *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
3. Sara Safransky (2020). [Geographies of Algorithmic Violence: Redlining the Smart City](#). *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 44(2), 200-218.
4. Donald McNeil (2016). [Governing a City of Unicorns: Technology capital and the urban politics of San Francisco](#). *Urban Geography*, 37(4), 494-513.

WEEK 9

Monday, October 24: DATA CENTERS AND CRYPTO MINING

Rural land and hydroelectric power were central to logging and fishing industries formed by settler; today

these rural resources enable the accumulation of capital via cryptocurrency mining and data storage. This week, we engage with texts that examine the geographies of data centers and cryptomining.

To read before class:

1. Nick Lally, Kelly Kay, Jim Thatcher (2022). [Computational parasites and hydropower: A political ecology of Bitcoin mining on the Columbia River](#). *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*.
2. Jenna Burrell (2020). [On Half-Built Assemblages: Waiting for a Data Center in Prineville, Oregon](#). *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* volume 6, p. 283-305.
3. Ed Atkins, Luca Follis, Benjamin Neimark, Vanessa Thomas (2021). [Uneven development, crypto-regionalism, and the \(un-\)tethering of nature in Quebec](#). *Geoforum*.

WEEK 10

Monday, October 31: CARCERALITY, CONTAINMENT, AND BANISHMENT

Across urban and rural geographies, new technologies have long been a means of surveilling and classifying populations to enforce socio-spatial and racial boundaries. This week we bring together automated border enforcement, data-driven policing, and citizen-led surveillance to examine themes of carcerality, containment, and banishment.

To read before class:

1. Rahim Kurwa (2019). Building the Digitally Gated Community: The Case of Nextdoor.
2. Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2019). [Automating Banishment: The Surveillance and Policing of Looted Lands](#) (summary). Review of [interactive report and maps](#) encouraged.
3. Juan De Lara (2022). Race, Algorithms, and the Work of Border Enforcement.
4. Brian Jordan Jefferson (2022). [Information Technology, Surveillance, and Race in the U.S.](#)

WEEK 11

Monday, November 7: PRECISION AGRICULTURE

This week we explore precision agriculture: what is it, how do we understand its political and environmental implications, and to what extent is it a radical development?

To read before class:

1. Jennifer Clapp and Sarah-Louise Ruder (2020). Precision technologies for agriculture: digital farming, gene-edited crops, and the politics of sustainability.
2. Christopher Miles (2019). The combine will tell the truth: On precision agriculture and algorithmic rationality.
3. Sarah Rotz. Et al. (2019). Automated pastures and the digital divide: How agricultural technologies are shaping labor and rural communities.

WEEK 12

Monday, November 14: PROPERTY TECHNOLOGIES

How are questions of property bound up with technology? This week we consider the political economy of digital transformations of housing, anti-capitalist experiments in property, and struggles against landlord tech.

To read before class:

1. Erin McElroy and Manon Vergerio (2022). [Automating Gentrification: landlord technologies and housing justice organizing in New York City](#).
2. Desiree Fields (2022). [Automated Landlord: Digital technologies and post-crisis financial accumulation](#).
3. Miranda Hall (2020). [How to Pick a Smart Lock](#). e-flux architecture

WEEK 13

Monday, November 21: WILDCARD!

Possibilities for this week's theme include: gaming and the metaverse, social media and rural secessionism, gig labor and the hustle economy, short-term cities

To read before class:

TBD

WEEK 14

Monday, November 28: GLITCHES, SCAMS, AND CONTESTATION

How do we build digital geographies that refuse domination, extraction, and predatory inclusion? What does an abolitionist politics of technology look like? What does disruptive urban technology look like when designed from the ground up?

To read before class:

1. Casey Lynch (2020). [Contesting Digital Futures: Urban Politics, Alternative Economies, and the Movement for Technological Sovereignty in Barcelona.](#)
2. Rodrigo Ochigame (2020). [Informatics of the oppressed.](#)
3. Jovan Scott Lewis (2018). [Jamaica Calling: VoIP, ICT, and the Lotto Scam.](#)
4. Legacy Russell (2020). Introduction. In: *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto.*
5. Simon Weckert (2020) [Google Maps Hacks](#)

WEEK 15

Monday, December 5: R/R/R WEEK